

Open Support Team Q&A



The chance to be a member of the BIGGA Open Support Team is one of the many benefits of BIGGA membership. If you were lucky enough to have been chosen, what can you expect at Muirfield in July?

The BIGGA Open Support Team members are an important part of the behind the scenes unit at one of the world's greatest sporting events. It offers members the chance to follow in the footsteps of legendary golfers and learn from the greenkeeping teams at the UK's top golfing venues – another real benefit of BIGGA membership.

We've had several queries over the years about the way the Team is formed and the various roles they perform at the Open Championship – so here's BIGGA's General Manager Tracey Maddison to answer your questions.



Q) How many BIGGA members applied to join The Open Support Team 2013?

A) We received over 100 applications with a wide range of ages, experience and geographical locations. We had applications from as far afield as Ireland, Sweden, Vietnam, Australia, USA and Germany.

Q) What process do you follow to select the Team?

A) It is quite a scientific process! We look at every single application we receive thoroughly - it's vital we have a good mix of experienced members, younger members and overseas members. It's important to

ensure that there is a core of people who have Open Championship experience in the Team to act as mentors for those who are involved for the first time.

Over the years the responsibilities of the Team have increased and the R&A and the host club are keen that there are some experienced heads in the key roles during the week. As part of the process there is a guarantee that a certain number of first time applicants are selected as well as a good number of members who are engaged with BIGGA at Section level or through CPD. The Team are split into five groups or 'pods' with each having a Pod Leader who has good prior experience of the event. Each pod remain together for transportation etc throughout the week, and generate a real camaraderie.

Q) What do the Support Team do?

There are a lot of early mornings! We have a team on the course from 4am every day from the Tuesday through to the Sunday, preparing the golf course alongside the home greenkeeping team – particularly the bunkers – for the day's play. We then send out a member with each match to rake every single bunker the players land in and attend to any other greenkeeping issue that may arise. Then they can be out until late at night on divot duty. It depends what time the last match goes out, but sometimes they can still be working on the course after 9pm.

The evening before each day's play we have a random draw to decide who joins which group of players – so there's real excitement as nobody knows if they are going to join a quiet early morning round or

follow the champion up the final fairway. It's fair to say that everybody is absolutely exhausted by Sunday, but the adrenaline and excitement keeps everyone going.

The Team are also on hand to deal with whatever the weather throws at us. Last year an enormous amount of rain fell unexpectedly during the Thursday night, so we got a bunch of extra guys out of their beds at 4am on the Friday to go and deal with the water in bunkers. When you think of the millions of people across the world tuning in just a few hours later, you appreciate how important this job is.

Also, I think it's a huge educational opportunity. No matter where in the country or what course the members of the Support Team are from, they will always learn something – a new technique or a way of approaching a problem – from the greenkeeping team working at The Open venue itself and from their fellow Team members, and that can only help their daily work and future career.

Q) How important is their role?

We've supported the existing greenkeeping teams at Open Championships since 1984 now, and the team's responsibility is increasing all the time.

We received a terrific letter from Paul Smith, Head Greenkeeper at Royal Lytham & St Annes Golf Club, after last year's event saying how the team did a sterling job under very difficult circumstances – particularly overnight Thursday into Friday – which shows how vital the team's work is. Paul also came into the BIGGA marquee on the Sunday to personally thank the whole team.